

How Changes to Family Immigration Could Affect Source Countries' Sending Patterns

The Senate immigration bill (The Secure Borders, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Reform Act of 2007) includes a fundamental revision of family-based permanent immigration streams. Family-based immigration would continue to be the largest single stream of permanent legal immigration numerically. In addition, the backlog clearance provisions of the bill would result in expedited processing of approximately four million family-member applications during the eight years after enactment. Thus, it would be a significant period of time before the proposed family-based revisions would be fully felt. However, understanding the likely impact of such reforms is important as the country continues to debate changes to the immigration selection system.

Under current law, US citizens may sponsor their spouses, minor children, and parents without numerical limits. US citizens may sponsor adult married and unmarried children and siblings, subject to worldwide and per-country limits. Lawful permanent residents (LPRs) may sponsor their spouses and minor children, and adult unmarried children, similarly subject to numerical limitations.

Under the Senate bill, the family sponsorship categories for adult children (both unmarried and married) and siblings would be eliminated, and the category for parents would be given an annual cap. Eligible immigrants for whom a sponsor had filed an application for permanent immigration through a category slated to be eliminated would be issued visas in an expedited manner as long as the application was submitted before May 1, 2005. This would clear the sometimes decades-long backlogs in which such immigrants are waiting. Immigrants who earned sufficient points under the Senate-proposed points system could earn additional points toward entry for being the adult child or sibling of a US citizen or LPR.

Appendix 1 shows the allocation of permanent visas ("green cards") under the current immigration system and the Senate proposal. Overall, the reforms would shift the system from one that allocates about two-thirds of permanent visas to family members and less than one-fifth to employment-based immigrants, to a system that eventually allocates perhaps less than half of all visas to family members and about two-fifths to points-based immigrants.

Tables 1 and 2 below show the top countries of origin of immigrants utilizing the various current family-sponsorship categories in fiscal year (FY) 2006, the latest year for which data is available. A few notable points emerge from these tables:

- Overall, half of the countries sending most family-based immigrants to the United States in 2006 were Latin American or Caribbean nations, while the other half were Asian nations.
- Latin American/Caribbean nations dominate among preference categories for the unmarried adult children of US citizens and unmarried adult children of LPRs.
- Asian countries account for more immigrants through the sponsorship categories for married adult children of US citizens and siblings of US citizens.
- Mexico is the source of more than twice as many parents as any other country. Excluding Mexico, Asian countries are the origin of somewhat more parents in 2006 than Latin American or Caribbean countries.
- Therefore, elimination of some categories will most affect migration from Latin American and Caribbean countries, while elimination of other categories will most affect migration from Asia.

How Nationals of Countries Currently Using the Family-Based System Would Fare in a Points System

Examining the human capital characteristics of immigrants from some major family-immigrant sending countries offers hints to which countries' emigrants might be able to gain entry under the proposed points-based selection system.¹ The proposed points system assigns points to various factors: employment/age, education, English/civics, and family ties. Specifically, the points system would offer points for employment in a high-skill or high-growth occupation, being between ages 25 and 39, educational attainment, English ability, and as stated above, family members in the United States. (Appendix 2 shows the distribution of points in the Senate proposed points system.) Figures 1 through 5 below show the age distribution, educational attainment, English ability, and most common occupations of recent immigrants (since 1990) from some of the top family-immigrant sending countries, utilizing data from the 2005 American Community Survey, put out by the Census Bureau.

Generally, these figures show that in 2005:

- Recent immigrants from India, Korea, China, and the Philippines were most likely to have a bachelor's or higher degree, worth 16 points for a bachelor's degree, 20 for a graduate degree.
- Recent immigrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam were quite likely to lack a high school diploma, and would therefore earn no points for education.
- Recent immigrants from India and the Philippines had high rates of English proficiency, worth between 6 and 15 points depending on the level of English ability.
- Those from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Vietnam were most likely to be limited English proficient (LEP, meaning they reported speaking English less than "very well").

¹ For greater detail on the human capital characteristics of recent immigrants from major sending countries, see Demetrios Papademetriou, Jeanne Batalova, and Julia Gelatt, "Proposed Points System and Its Likely Impact on Prospective Immigrants" (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, May 2007), http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/PointsSystem_051807.pdf.

- The most common occupations among recent immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean were farming, construction, extraction, and transportation and service occupations. At least some of these are likely to be listed among the 30 occupations expected to create the most new jobs over the next ten years. Employment in these high-growth occupations would bring 16 points under the points system.
- The most common occupations among recent immigrants from Asia were service; sales; management, business, and finance; administrative support; and IT occupations. Management, business, and finance, and IT occupations are likely to be included among “specialty occupations,” defined as occupations that normally require a bachelor’s degree. Employment in such occupations would bring 20 points under the points system. IT occupations would count as “STEM” occupations (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics occupations), which would bring an additional eight points.
- India, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico had the highest shares of recent immigrants in the age range of 25-39, worth three points. (Note however, that these data show age in 2005 and not age at entry. Those who entered in 1990 have, of course, aged 15 years since they entered the United States.)

Table 1. Top Ten Sending Countries for Capped Family Preference Categories, Visas Issued 2006
Shaded categories are slated for elimination under the Senate immigration bill S. 1639

1st. Unmarried Adult Children of US citizens			2A. Spouses and Minor Children of LPRs			2B. Unmarried Adult Children of LPRs		
Country	Number	Share	Country	Number	Share	Country	Number	Share
Jamaica	3,109	12.9	Mexico	52,781	60.9	Domin Repub	7,949	34.6
Mexico	1,788	7.4	Domin Repub	4,863	5.6	Philippines	4,662	20.3
Philippines	1,637	6.8	El Salvador	3,621	4.2	Mexico	1,935	8.4
Guyana	1,384	5.8	China	2,407	2.8	Haiti	1,093	4.8
Domin Repub	1,355	5.6	Philippines	2,324	2.7	China	706	3.1
Colombia	1,141	4.7	India	1,547	1.8	El Salvador	671	2.9
Vietnam	936	3.9	Guatemala	1,452	1.7	Jamaica	604	2.6
China	885	3.7	Haiti	1,272	1.5	Colombia	418	1.8
El Salvador	742	3.1	Ecuador	1,243	1.4	Ecuador	400	1.7
Haiti	690	2.9	Bangladesh	1,243	1.4	Guatemala	338	1.5
Worldwide Total	24,029	100.0		86,682	100.0		22,942	100.0

3rd. Married Adult Children of US citizens			4th. Siblings of US citizens			Total Family Preference		
Country	Number	Share	Country	Number	Share	Country	Number	Share
Philippines	3,000	13.9	India	10,970	17.2	Mexico	62,967	28.8
China	2,252	10.5	China	9,860	15.5	Domin Repub	16,266	7.4
Vietnam	2,058	9.6	Vietnam	8,913	14.0	China	16,110	7.4
Mexico	1,821	8.5	Mexico	4,642	7.3	Philippines	15,463	7.1
Guyana	1,618	7.5	Philippines	3,840	6.0	India	14,672	6.7
India	1,429	6.6	Pakistan	2,098	3.3	Vietnam	12,919	5.9
Poland	876	4.1	Taiwan	1,875	2.9	Jamaica	6,015	2.7
South Korea	682	3.2	Bangladesh	1,683	2.6	El Salvador	5,788	2.6
Jamaica	462	2.1	Domin Repub	1,663	2.6	Guyana	4,736	2.2
Domin Repub	436	2.0	Hong Kong	1,343	2.1	Pakistan	3,852	1.8
Worldwide Total	21,511	100.0		63,712	100.0		218,876	100.0

Note: China refers to mainland China only.

Source: US Department of State, *Report of the Visa Office, 2006*, Table V, http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/statistics/statistics_3163.html.

Table 2. Top Ten Sending Countries for Uncapped Immediate Family of US citizens, Visas Issued 2006

Shaded categories are slated for elimination under the Senate immigration bill S. 1639

Spouse of US Citizen			Child of US Citizen		
Country	Number	Share	Country	Number	Share
Mexico	6,793	10.6	Mexico	8,327	14.9
India	4,389	6.8	Philippines	4,913	8.8
China	4,091	6.4	Domin Repub	4,339	7.8
Philippines	4,034	6.3	Jamaica	3,153	5.6
Vietnam	3,362	5.2	China	2,491	4.4
Japan	1,936	3.0	Colombia	2,078	3.7
Pakistan	1,614	2.5	Haiti	1,942	3.5
Domin Repub	1,526	2.4	Ecuador	1,656	3.0
Jamaica	1,438	2.2	Yemen	1,595	2.8
Bangladesh	1,420	2.2	El Salvador	1,440	2.6
Worldwide Total	64,252	100.0		55,980	100.0

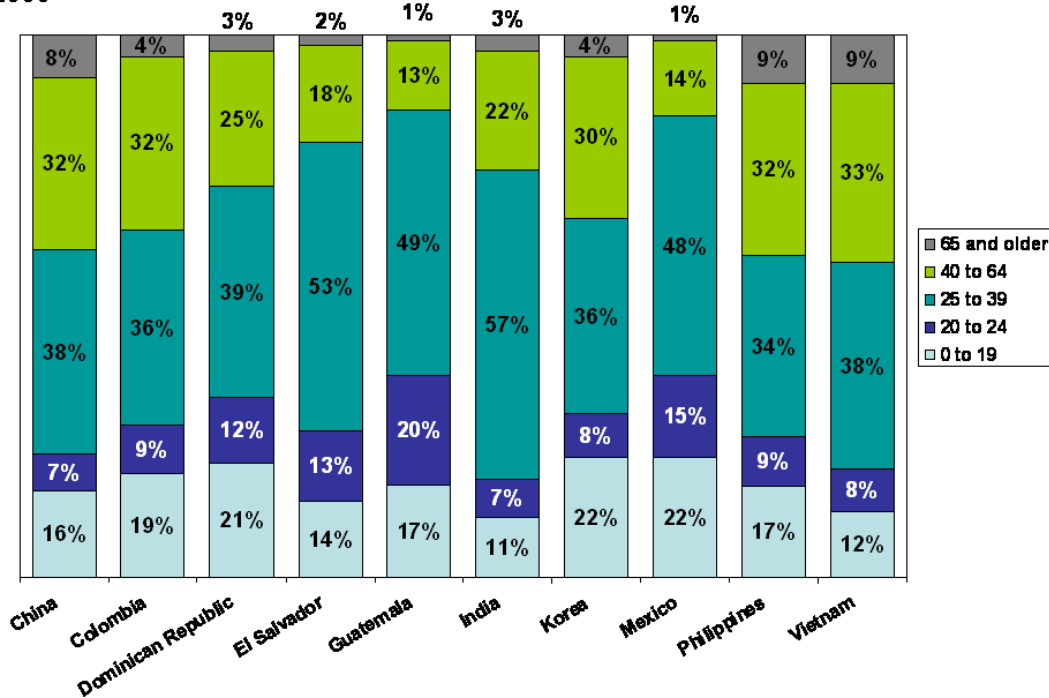
Parent of US Citizen			Total Immediate Family*		
Country	Number	Share	Country	Number	Share
Mexico	19,089	23.0	Mexico	34,292	15.3
China	7,804	9.4	China	20,886	9.3
India	7,295	8.8	Philippines	15,757	7.0
Philippines	6,524	7.8	India	12,905	5.8
Domin Repub	3,024	3.6	Domin Repub	8,921	4.0
Vietnam	2,926	3.5	Vietnam	7,638	3.4
Bangladesh	2,214	2.7	Jamaica	6,359	2.8
Iran	2,192	2.6	Guatemala	6,193	2.8
Ecuador	1,984	2.4	Russia	5,615	2.5
Colombia	1,754	2.1	Colombia	5,411	2.4
Worldwide Total	83,133	100.0		224,187	100.0

* In addition to the categories detailed above, immediate family preference categories also include foreign children adopted by US citizens and certain widow(er)s of US citizens and their children.

Note: China refers to mainland China only.

Source: US Department of State, *Report of the Visa Office, 2006*, Table V,
http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/statistics/statistics_3163.html

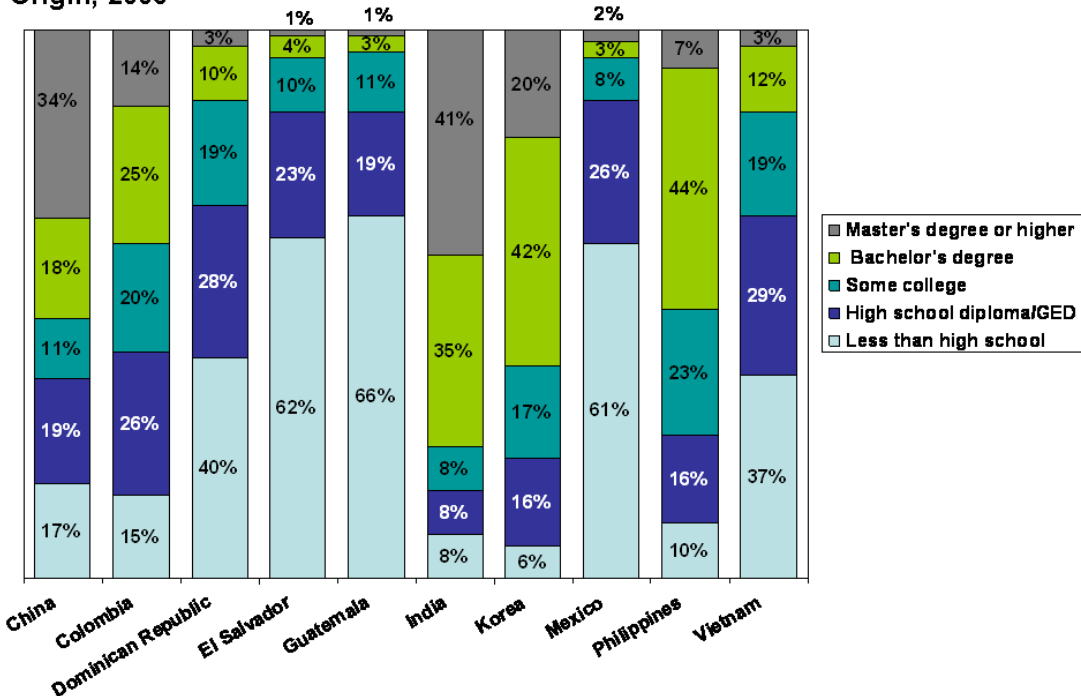
Figure 1. Age of Recent Immigrants from Select Countries of Origin, 2005



Note: China includes Hong Kong.

Source: 2005 American Community Survey

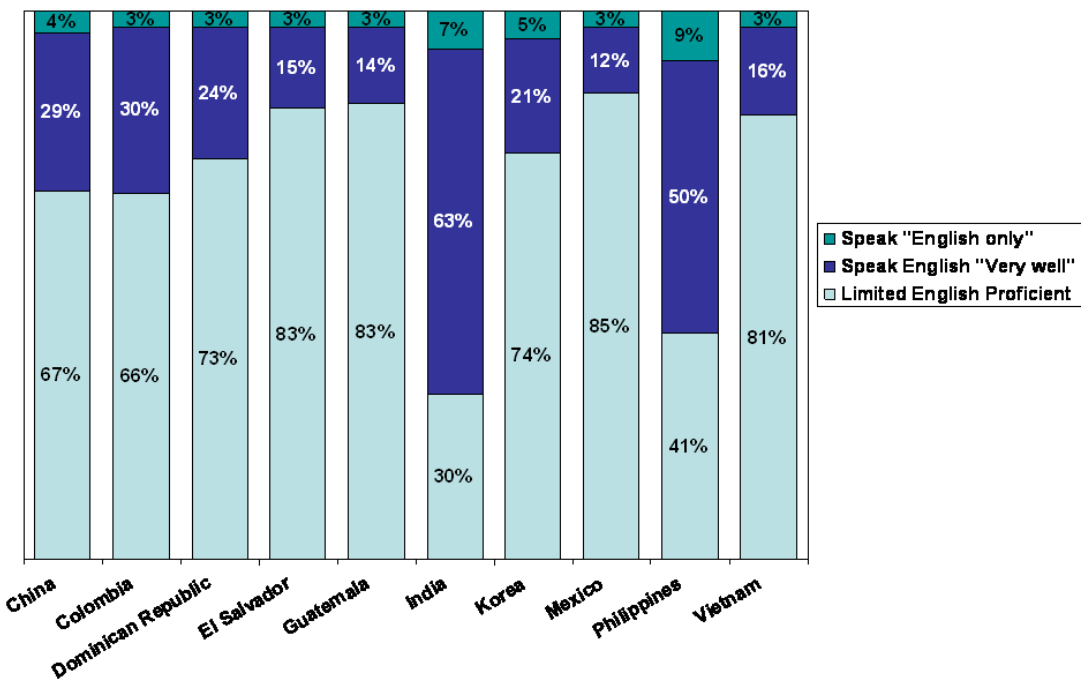
Figure 2. Educational Attainment of Recent Immigrants from Select Countries of Origin, 2005



Note: China includes Hong Kong.

Source: 2005 American Community Survey

Figure 3. English Proficiency of Recent Immigrants from Select Countries of Origin, 2005



Note: China includes Hong Kong.

Source: 2005 American Community Survey

Table 3. Occupations of Recent Immigrants, Age 16 and Older, from Select Countries of Origin, 2005

	Total	Manag/ Business/ Finance	IT	Non-IT Scientists & Engineers	Edu/ Training/ Entertain	Health	Service	Sales	Admin support	Farm/ Const/ Extract/ Transport	Manuf/ Install/ Repair	Other
<i>Likely classification in points system</i>		<i>Specialty</i>	<i>Specialty, STEM, high demand (for some)</i>	<i>Specialty, STEM</i>	<i>Specialty</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>High Demand (for some)</i>	<i>High Demand (for a few)</i>	<i>High Demand</i>	<i>High Demand (for a few)</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>
China/Hong Kong	546,829	11%	10%	13%	12%	5%	18%	9%	8%	4%	7%	2%
Colombia	217,356	8%	2%	3%	6%	4%	26%	11%	13%	12%	13%	3%
Dominican Republic	260,011	4%	0%	1%	3%	5%	29%	11%	11%	16%	16%	3%
El Salvador	423,845	3%	0%	0%	1%	1%	33%	6%	6%	30%	18%	2%
Guatemala	315,001	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%	30%	7%	4%	35%	18%	2%
India	704,320	14%	28%	9%	6%	8%	5%	11%	7%	4%	5%	2%
Korea	256,682	15%	4%	5%	14%	5%	14%	18%	9%	4%	6%	5%
Mexico	4,484,443	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%	29%	5%	4%	37%	18%	2%
Philippines	549,384	8%	3%	3%	3%	24%	17%	10%	15%	5%	9%	2%
Vietnam	391,868	5%	3%	3%	2%	3%	32%	7%	9%	6%	28%	2%

Notes: Excludes those who had not worked in the last five years or who reported no occupation. Employment in a specialty occupation brings 20 points, employment in a high demand occupation brings 16 points, and employment in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) or healthcare occupation brings 8 points.

Manag/Business/Finance = Management, Business, and Finance

IT = Information Technology

Edu/Training/Entertain = Education, Training, and Entertainment

Admin Support = Administrative Support

Farm/Const/Extract/Transport = Farming, Construction, Extraction, and Transportation

Manuf/Install/Repair = Manufacturing, Installation, and Repair

Source: 2005 American Community Survey.

Appendix 1. Comparison of Current and Proposed Permanent Family-Based Immigration Systems

CURRENT SYSTEM (average annual admissions FY 2002 to FY 2006)	Annual Number of LPRs	% of All LPRs	SENATE PROPOSAL, BEGINNING YEARS	Annual Number of LPRs	% of All LPRs	SENATE PROPOSAL, AFTER BACKLOGS CLEARED	Annual Number of LPRs	% of All LPRs
Total	1,007,545	100.0	Total	1,327,410	100.0	Total	1,020,532	100.0
Immediate family of US citizens (no overall cap, no per-country limit)	449,898	44.7	Immediate family of US citizens* (no overall cap, no per-country limit)	361,269	27.2	Immediate family of US citizens* (no overall cap, no per-country limit)	361,269	35.4
Spouses	265,639	26.4	Spouses	265,639	20.0	Spouses	265,639	26.0
Minor children	95,630	9.5	Minor children	95,630	7.2	Minor children	95,630	9.4
Parents	88,629	8.8						
Family-sponsored immigrants (floor = 226,000, per-country limit = 7%)	199,046	19.8	Family-sponsored immigrants (per-country limit = 10%)	567,000	42.7	Family-sponsored immigrants (per-country limit = 10%)	127,000	12.4
1 Adult unmarried children of US citizens	24,306	2.4	2A Spouses/minor children of LPRs	87,000	6.6	2A Spouses/minor children of LPRs	87,000	8.5
2A Spouses/minor children of LPRs	67,775	6.7	Parents of US citizens	40,000	3.0	Parents of US citizens	40,000	3.9
2B Adult unmarried children of LPRs	21,000	2.1	Backlog reduction, categories 1/2B/3/4**	440,000	33.1			
3 Adult married children of US citizens	24,293	2.4						
4 Siblings of US citizens	61,691	6.1						
Employment-based immigrants (cap=140,000 on principals & dependents, per-country limit = 7%)	167,701	16.6	Merit-based immigrants (applies to first five years, per-country limit = 10%)	253,878	19.1	Merit-based immigrants (per-country limit = 10%)*	387,000	37.9
1 Priority Workers	37,364	3.7	Merit-based immigrants***	246,878	18.6	Merit-based immigrants	380,000	37.2
2 Professionals with advanced degrees/persons with exceptional ability	35,536	3.5	Exceptional Y visa holders	≥ 10,000		Exceptional Y visa holders	≥ 10,000	
3 Skilled workers, professionals, other workers	87,253	8.7	Backlog reduction, categories 1/2/3	≥ 90,000		Special immigrants	4,200	0.4
4 Special immigrants	7,373	0.7	Special immigrants	4,200	0.3	Employment creation	2,800	0.3
5 Employment creation	176	0.0	Employment creation	2,800	0.2			
Other immigrants	190,899	18.9	Other immigrants*	145,263	10.9	Other immigrants*	145,263	14.2
Refugees and asylees	98,742	9.8	Refugees and asylees	98,742	7.4	Refugees and asylees	98,742	9.7
Legalized under IRCA	135	0.0	Other immigrants	46,521	3.5	Other immigrants	46,521	4.6
Diversity (cap=50,000)	45,502	4.5						
Other immigrants	46,521	4.6						

Notes:

* Assumes visa demand for immediate family of US citizens and other immigrants remains at 2002-2006 levels.

** Would be exempt from per-country limits.

*** After the first five years, the number of merit-based immigrant visas would fall to 140,000 per year until the backlogs were cleared.

**** Table does not include the supplemental merit-based visas to be made available to accommodate those adjusting to permanent resident status from a Z visa.

Sources: US Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2002-2006* (Washington, DC: US Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, 2004-2007); S. 1639.

Appendix 2. Senate-Proposed Points System for Permanent Immigration

	Points Allotted	Maximum Points Allowed
Employment		
Specialty Occupation	20	47
High Demand Occupation	16	
STEM* or Health Occupation	8	
US Employer Sponsor	6	
Years of Work for US Firm	2 per year, up to 10	
Age	3	
Education		
Advanced Degree	20	28
Bachelor's Degree	16	
Associate's Degree	10	
High School Diploma or GED	6	
Perkins Vocational Education Program	5	
Apprenticeship	8	
STEM*, Associate's Degree or Above	8	
English and Civics		
TOEFL of 75 or higher	15	15
TOEFL of 60-74	10	
Pass USCIS Citizenship Test	6	
Extended Family**		
Adult Child of USC***	8	10
Adult Child of LPR	6	
Sibling of USC*** or LPR	4	
Applied for family visa in any above category after May 1, 2005	2	
TOTAL POINTS		100

* STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

** Immigrants could earn points for extended family only if they earn a total of 55 points from other categories.

*** USC = US citizens

DATA SOURCE

The data are from the Report of the Visa Office of the Department of State, Senate bill S. 1639, and analysis of the Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey (ACS) by MPI Policy Analyst Jeanne Batalova. The 2005 ACS is based on a sample of the US population living in households, but not the population living in group quarters such as college dormitories, prisons, or long-term care facilities.

FY 2006 began in October 1, 2005 and ended on September 30, 2006.

EDITORIAL NOTE

This Fact Sheet was updated on June 25, 2007, after its original release.

This information was compiled by MPI Research Assistant Julia Gelatt in June 2007. For questions or to arrange an interview with an MPI expert on immigration, please contact Colleen Coffey, Director of Communications, at (202) 266-1910 or ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org. Please visit us at www.migrationpolicy.org.

For more information on immigration to the United States and worldwide, visit the Migration Information Source, MPI's online publication, at www.migrationinformation.org. The Source provides fresh thought, authoritative data from numerous global organizations and governments, and analysis of international migration trends.

Previous Publications in MPI's *IMMIGRATION FACTS* series may be found at
www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/fact_sheets.php

Fact Sheet #1: US Immigration Since September 11, 2001

Elizabeth Grieco, Deborah Meyers, and Kathleen Newland
September 2003

Fact Sheet #2: Unauthorized Immigration to the United States

MPI Staff
October 2003

Fact Sheet #3: US-Mexico-Canada Trade and Migration

Rebecca Jannol, Deborah Meyers, and Maia Jachimowicz
November 2003

Fact Sheet #4: The Foreign Born in the US Labor Force

Elizabeth Grieco
January 2004

Fact Sheet #5: What Kind of Work Do Immigrants Do? Occupation and Industry of Foreign-Born Workers in the United States

Elizabeth Grieco
January 2004

Fact Sheet #6: International Agreements of the Social Security Administration

Deborah Meyers
January 2004

Fact Sheet #7: Immigrants and Union Membership: Numbers and Trends

Elizabeth Grieco
May 2004

Fact Sheet #8: Health Insurance Coverage of the Foreign Born in the United States: Numbers and Trends

Elizabeth Grieco
June 2004

Fact Sheet #9: Legal Immigration to the US Still Declining

Deborah Meyers and Jennifer Yau
October 2004

Fact Sheet #10: Backlogs in Immigration Processing Persist

Kevin Jernegan, Doris Meissner, Elizabeth Grieco, and Colleen Coffey
October 2004

Fact Sheet #11: United-States-Canada-Mexico Fact Sheet on Trade and Migration

Megan Davy and Deborah Meyers
October 2005

Fact Sheet #12: Legal Immigration to US Up from Last Year

Julia Gelatt and Deborah Meyers
October 2005

Fact Sheet #13: Legal Immigration to the United States Increased Substantially in FY 2005

Julia Gelatt and Deborah Meyers
November 2005

Fact Sheet #14: One in Seven Mexican Workers Are in the United States

Jeanne Batalova
November 2006

Fact Sheet #15: Immigration Fee Increases in Context

Julia Gelatt and Margie McHugh
February 2007

Fact Sheet #16: Actual Immigration to the United States: The Real Numbers

Julia Gelatt
May 2007

Fact Sheet #17: Document Security Provisions: What's in the Cards?

Dawn Konet
June 2007

Fact Sheet #18: Changing Family Immigration: How the Cuts Affect Major Source Countries

Julia Gelatt
June 2007